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Manuel Chinchilla

*Sewanee-The University of the South*

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# Constructing the Democratic Reader: The Functions of Textual Hybridity in *La noche de Tlatelolco*

MANUEL CHINCHILLA

SEWANEE-THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH

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**Abstract:** A study of Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* as a hybrid text that combines the genres of *testimonio* and chronicle to reconcile the relationship between history and literature. This article centers on how readership of *La noche de Tlatelolco* permits a democratic practice that confronts official discourse, particularly the PRI party's narratives of legitimization, while also fostering an engagement with the original political impulse behind the student movement of 1968.

**Key Terms:** Elena Poniatowska, 1968 Massacre-Tlatelolco, chronicle, *testimonio*, student movement, Mexican history, state exceptionalism

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The state-sponsored massacre that occurred on October 2, 1968 in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Square is one of the most discussed and commemorated events in contemporary Mexican history. Both the activism of the student movement, and the government's violent reaction to it, have been the subject of numerous accounts, in the form of documentaries, *testimonios* and works of fiction. Ahead of this extensive production, Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971) continues to be considered the text that most accurately portrays the circumstances surrounding the events, as well as the inherent difficulties in representing them.

Although *La noche de Tlatelolco* displays the hallmarks of Latin American *testimonio*, its subtitle, "testimonios de historia oral," articulates a claim for the historical nature of the text without drawing attention to its significant editorializing and aesthetic processes. These tensions make literary classification problematic because of the hybrid use of generic conventions and its ambivalence with regards to genres and readership. The plural scope of the book's compilation of voices, coupled with Poniatowska's singular editorial register, exceeds the conventions of *testimonio*, where narration is thought to be anchored in the unity of a life that stands for a particular community. In this sense, *La noche de Tlatelolco*

moves between a personal, but plural discourse and a historical referentiality that extends beyond those who have suffered (the students, their families, the victims of the massacre), to include a broader spectrum of society and, significantly, a number of agents of the Mexican state. This open inclusion of subjects results from the way in which Poniatowska makes *testimonio* interact with the chronicle, to produce a hybrid text that defies literary classification and also defies a readership to take on the democratic practice that once belonged to the student movement. This essay will examine the text's contestation of history and truth as unequivocal discourses, by focusing on the far-reaching register of its textuality<sup>1</sup>: the inclusion of diverse kinds of discourse, opinions, and interpretations to explain the creation of an active reader who is called upon to make sense of history.

Carlos Monsiváis has proposed a theory of the Mexican student movement based on "reading phases" ("etapas de lectura"), in which *La noche de Tlatelolco* holds a particular stake in the infinite usefulness of alternative readings with regard to civic practices:

Si en 1971 *La noche de Tlatelolco* es denuncia y *testimonio*, en los años siguientes divulga el método profundo del movimiento, el arribo a la crítica a través de la indignación cívica, y la continuidad de la indignación gracias a la crítica. (Scherer, 259)

It is through this counterpoint between criticism and "civic indignation" that *La noche de Tlatelolco* maintains a productive discussion between past struggles and their reiteration in the present. The study of *La noche de Tlatelolco* as a set of representational conventions blending reading and the practice of democracy is another way of contesting the linearity of nationalist discourse and centering on the active interface between text and reader.

## OFFICIAL HISTORY INTERRUPTED

Understanding the meaning of 1968 demands a

critical perspective beyond the events that took place in that tumultuous year, tracing their relationship to the country's previous history. Elena Poniatowska is one among a group of writers and intellectuals who have sought to consider the massacre and the activism of 1968 within a broader understanding of Mexican history.<sup>2</sup> A problem common to some texts that deal with the events of October 2 is that they avoid examining the student movement and the history that preceded the massacre, opting instead to focus on the ultimate moment of bloodshed, and sometimes nationalizing, even naturalizing, violence as a Mexican ritual or essence. That is in part what Octavio Paz's *Postdata* (1970) does by claiming the massacre as part of a never-ending cycle of Mexican violence recurring throughout history (from the Aztec Empire on through the Spanish conquest and up to modern times) discarding in this way a contextual understanding of 1968. Paz, in spite of his stance against the massacre and his resignation as Mexican ambassador to India, still produced an account that diluted the events of the movement within a nationalist history linked to the succession of sovereign power in Mexico City.<sup>3</sup> A deeper understanding of 1968 needs to take into account the movement's interruption of a mythological understanding of power and the narrative of progress promoted by the PRI. *La noche de Tlatelolco* reenacts the disruptive quality of 1968 as an antagonist to the institutionalized history of the PRI and the myths that legitimated its power. In other words, the book's narration is intricately tied to notions of legitimacy and democratic rule, prerogatives that the PRI regime suspended through its use of force.<sup>4</sup>

The disruption to official history caused by the 1968 events is the subject of many memoirs and novels. '68 (1991) by Paco Ignacio Taibo II is one of those works that most clearly defines the generational gap that separated the students from nationalist myths. Taibo II explains his generation's distance from official political discourse as well as their incipient solidarity to an underground history of struggle:

We were strangers, too, in history. We did not come from the national past. [...] We were barely aware of the railroad-workers' movement and its jailed leader, Demetrio Vallejo; we had heard vaguely of Rubén Jaramillo, but we could not have told his story.

We felt absolutely no connection to Morelos, Zapata, Villa, to Vicente Guerrero, Hidalgo, Leandro Valle, to Guillermo Prieto, or to Mina (Taibo II, 22).

This passage acknowledges the estrangement of Mexico's youth with regard to the mythical figures and heroes of the independence movement and the 1910 Revolution. The key mid-20<sup>th</sup> century figures of Demetrio Vallejo and Rubén Jaramillo are posited for garnering the attention of a new generation. Rubén Jaramillo (who had fought under the leadership of revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata, murdered by other victors of the Revolution) was assassinated by federal troops in 1962 due to his activities as a *campesino* organizer.<sup>5</sup> According to Hodges and Gandy, authors of *Mexico Under Siege: Popular Resistance to Presidential Despotism*, Jaramillo is a key figure connecting the 1910 Revolution and the inherent popular struggle (different from the PRI's institutionalized version) that continued in the protest movements of the 1960s through the 1970s. Demetrio Vallejo was the leader of the Railroad Workers Union (*Sindicato de Trabajadores Ferrocarrileros de la República Mexicana*) and had been incarcerated since 1959 because of his determination to generate an independent union movement.<sup>6</sup> What 1968 produced was the meeting point between official history—represented by the PRI regime as rightful heir of the revolution—and unofficial, underground history, where the claims of official power were dispelled, demonstrating its inner workings of union busting practices and the incarceration of political dissidents.

## UNMASKING VIOLENCE

Only ten days after the violent events of October 2, Mexico successfully inaugurated the 1968 Summer Olympics, which were celebrated without delay or significant protests. The PRI maintained a complex system of censorship, what Peter Watt has termed an "invisible tyranny" that produced the image of a free-press in spite of governmental control over media. The lack of a national free-press also influenced international reporting about the massacre. Journalist John Rodda, who covered the 1968 games for *The Guardian*, has recently discussed the difficulty of writing an accurate report on the massacre for the international media. (16-20) A first-hand witness to the Tlatelolco massacre, Rodda was one of a few

foreign journalists who tried to convince the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to cancel the games.<sup>7</sup> The fact is that despite the public manner in which state violence was carried out at Tlatelolco, knowledge about the massacre was only to be reached through a long process of unmasking official cover-ups, and by going against the image of national progress portrayed by the Olympic games.

Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young have observed the ideological meaning given to global sports events by host nations wanting “to celebrate a historical legacy and to aspire to the expression of their modernity [...]” (Tomlinson and Young, 5) Cultural critics have analyzed how the Olympics offered the Mexican government a unique platform to display the benefits of the Revolution and the equality of the nation vis-à-vis international powers. Claire and Keith Brewster categorized the government rhetoric that surrounded the Olympics as one that strived to present Mexico as “an aspirant to the First World, and a champion of the Third World, a standard bearer for Latin America.” (103)<sup>8</sup> Eric Zolov has proposed the most in-depth analysis about the Olympics in relation to Mexican national aspirations. Zolov based the relationship on a discursive problematic, what he calls “Mexico’s burden of representation,” the need for the nation to disavow negative images and replace them with ideals of progress. Notions about *mestizaje* as the overcoming of racial prejudice, the revolutionary government as guarantor of peace, and Mexican history as one that followed a path of progress, were constituted in the propaganda, cultural activities, and slogans of the games. (Zolov, 169)<sup>9</sup> Keith Brewster has also analyzed educational campaigns produced by the Confederación Deportiva Mexicana (Mexican Sports Confederation) meant to rein in the behavior of lower classes and unruly types in Mexico City. He focused on a series of television ads as symptoms of anxiety on behalf of an elite class that identified with international ideals of modernity. (Keith Brewster, 62) Thus, the activism of the students, their demands and mobilization, was another image that threatened Mexico’s progress and “official” history. The state’s response to such threats to the master national narrative was the disproportionate violence at Tlatelolco, and subsequent erasure.

However, the moment of violence and the ensuing state cover-up cannot be the sole compass in understanding the massacre or the movement. Taibo II warns about

a discourse of martyrdom that erases the just objectives of the student movement: “In memory, the second of October has replaced the hundred days of the strike. The black magic of the cult of defeat and of the dead has reduced ’68 to Tlatelolco alone.” (Taibo II, 108) *La noche de Tlatelolco* counteracts erasure of political activism by returning to the movement’s beginnings. Poniatowska has expressed the strategic importance of making the testimonio encompass a more extensive view on the movement and the massacre. In discussing her interviews of student leaders arrested in the Lecumberri prison, Poniatowska remarked how for them the massacre could not be understood without accounting for the movement’s prior context of activism, and that the importance of this referential frame influenced her approach to testimonial narrative:

Based on what they told me, my first concept for the book changed. I had thought of making it only an account of the night of Tlatelolco. But later I told myself that that night could not be explained if one were unaware of the student movement that led up to the night of Tlatelolco. No one would be able to understand its dimensions if the movement were not included. (Poniatowska in Schuessler, 168)<sup>10</sup>

It is the nucleus of activism, which is precisely at the heart of the student movement and the events to which it led, that can alone explain the importance of Poniatowska’s testimonio for Mexican culture and history. In the next section I will turn to an analysis of the textual resources she employed to examine the disruptive power of historical context against official narrative.

## BETWEEN CHRONICLE AND TESTIMONIO, OR THE LEGIBILITY OF EXPERIENCE

*La noche de Tlatelolco*’s complex textuality derives from its particular use of testimonial narrative. By compiling and mixing different types of discourse, and reproducing them in diverse registers, Poniatowska permits her text to fluctuate between a plurality of voices expressing deep emotions and convictions, and the seemingly evident proofs about the events, granting the reader a critical situational position from which information is assessed.

The reader moves from the intimacy of the speakers to the depiction of a public sphere, in which diverse opinions create a textual narrative defined by Diana Sorensen as “a fiction of civil society.” (Sorensen, 310) The text poses this duality of worlds, fact and feeling, proof and allusion, the personal and the social, while always instilling a productive doubt in the reader. It is through the proliferation of registers, voices, and meanings that *La noche de Tlatelolco* both imitates and counters testimonio as a discrete genre.

John Beverley’s study of testimonio places utmost importance upon the “I” that simultaneously narrates struggle and stands for the suffering community. Beverley also discusses the production of a polyphonic testimonio with a metonymic quality equivalent to the classical testimonio in which the narrator embodies his/her community. (Beverley, 35)<sup>11</sup> Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonio, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983; *I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian woman in Guatemala*) stands as the basis for Beverley’s theory and of many others about the genre. But Beverley’s definition, based on an analysis of Menchú’s account, can only be partially applied to *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Although Poniatowska arranges a multiplicity of first-person accounts, those are not the only types of testimonials offered and every “I” defies the representation of a homogeneous community. Theorization of testimonio has also borrowed from subaltern studies and it poses the speech of a marginal subject against official discourse. Despite the victimization of students and citizens during the massacre, and the use of testimonials as a counter-discourse to official narrative, the Mexican students cannot be made equals of Rigoberta Menchú because they do not occupy the same marginal position in terms of ethnicity or literacy.<sup>12</sup>

Reflecting on the contradictions between Poniatowska’s and Menchú’s testimonios, Elzbieta Skłodowska indicates that *La noche de Tlatelolco* is better understood as a hybrid genre, one in which Poniatowska uses the ethnographic register to denote the militant community while simultaneously producing an open defiance of official discourse at the level of historiography. (Skłodowska, 156) This narrative shift between a communal experience and a historical event authorizes Poniatowska’s text to establish a critical relationship to truth. (Ibid, 173) Beth Jörgensen also emphasizes the text’s narrative strategy as one that is self-critical about its claim to truth, but that also privileges the victims and their allies by not making

them embody a dominant hegemonic discourse similar to the one employed by the state. (Jörgensen, 76) This critical gesture does not relativize either the massacre or its denunciation, but engages the reader in a public condemnation based on an independent assessment of the narration. Poniatowska’s testimonial writing enhances the reader’s autonomy by means of its discursive diversity and its relentless questioning of all evidence regardless of how reliable it may seem, granting equal doubt to the two disputed versions, that of the state, and that of the students.

... the distinctive textuality of the testimonials ... is closely connected to the democratic practices ... of the students.

The diversity of narrative and representational resources used in *La noche de Tlatelolco* is made evident by the use of a photo-essay to preface the book. The images selected by Poniatowska retell both the student activism and the pain caused during and after the massacre.<sup>13</sup> The images exhibit a journalistic register, striving for an objective depiction of the events. However, they are clearly meant to entice the inquisitiveness of the reader who will only obtain a full understanding of the massacre after reading the plurality of versions compiled in the *testimonio*.

*La noche de Tlatelolco* is divided into two sections. The first, “Ganar la calle” (take the streets), which retells the beginnings of the student movement, recounts the organization of the *Consejo Nacional de Huelga* (National Strike Council), including the vast array of educational institutions and political perspectives it sheltered. This first segment is important not only because of its description of the origins of the movement, but also because it conveys the democratic processes employed by the students, articulating the fact that they did not represent a homogeneous community. Instead, the text describes conflicting divisions between universities, such as the class differences between the IPN (Instituto Politécnico Nacional) and the UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) (Poniatowska, 26-27), and the challenges in establishing a rapport between students and popular sectors, *campesinos*, and workers. (Ibid, 42-43, 48, 82) Likewise, the distinctive textuality of the



testimonials, based on divergence rather than assimilation to one perspective, is closely connected to the democratic practices—assemblies, debates, brigades—of the students. Besides the discrepancy of opinions comprised in the testimonials, it is significant to note the varied nature of the compilation since the narratives also reenact spaces, practices, and peripheral testimonial discourses. For example, on several occasions chants from protests and slogans from banners are reproduced on the page, and given relevance as testimonial accounts. (Poniatowska, 15, 21) *La noche de Tlatelolco* also includes reproductions of posters, billboards, and leaflets made by the students (Ibid, 17, 20, 61); government statements and university documents such as UNAM Rector Javier Barros Sierra's letter of resignation (Ibid, 74-75); newspaper headlines informing about the massacre (Ibid, 164-166); even *corridos* inspired by student leaders find a place within the narrative. (Ibid,

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67) The reader engages on a testimonial discourse that captures an almost inexhaustible textual plurality as it seeks to absorb a full account of snapshots of social life reproduced in writing. The excess of registers and genres is akin to a novelistic portrayal, but Poniatowska's text never ceases to claim a direct foundation in reality. The reason for the text's efficacy in absorbing and reproducing reality is its hybrid textuality as *testimonio* and chronicle.

*Testimonio* is a narration invested in divulging a community's history and struggles to readers who stand outside of it. One of its main objectives is to shed light on abuses against minorities and to foster solidarity toward them. And yet, in spite of *testimonio*'s intimate description of hardship and abuse, studies about the genre—particularly those based on Rigoberta Menchú's account—have also identified a strategic use of silence and the withholding of information by the speaker to safeguard his or her community from outsiders. By turning certain information into vital secrets that belong exclusively to

members of the community and that act as a defense from a broader population, *testimonio* is at once open and reticent about the transmission of information.<sup>14</sup> *La noche de Tlatelolco*, on the contrary, does not reenact the movement as a closed community whose inner-workings need to be guarded from outsiders, choosing instead to depict it as open, and welcoming to diverse members. Such openness is of course reflected in the variety of representational modes at work in *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Juan Gelpí has acknowledged this difference and pointed to the use of urban modes of mediation in the text, conceiving Poniatowska's work as open and readily legible, situating it within the history of the Latin American chronicle. Gelpí explains that the chronicle as a genre, particularly in twentieth century Mexico, has been defined by whether it embraced or rejected popular culture. Poniatowska belongs to a group of writers who, according to Gelpí, have used the chronicle to catalogue as well as to propose the value of popular culture and its subjects. In *La noche de Tlatelolco*, this is made evident in the production of what Gelpí calls a "textual subject" that integrates "the crowd" (*la muchedumbre*) through urban multiplicity. (Gelpí, 289) This urban multiplicity has as much to do with the diversity of speaking subjects represented in the text as with the different forms of media that appear in it, from newspaper articles to government and student communiqués, popular songs, and public demonstrations. As mentioned before, this additional testimonial diversity produces the discursive space suitable to the civil society that moves throughout the narration, a textual public sphere that takes on the democratic claims of the student movement. *La noche de Tlatelolco* disrupts the canonical representation of individual *testimonio*, registering a multiplicity of voices, and making them visible through urban life. In this deployment of metaphorical public speech, the chronicle contaminates *testimonio* and makes it behave as an open forum refusing to be a secret discourse. *La noche de Tlatelolco* exploits the intimacy of *testimonio* but reframes it as an open and legible experience, constituting a readership of the movement that imitates the democratic attitude of the students.

## READING AS DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

The proposition of an active reading practice is summarized in the poem by Rosario Castellanos that opens the second section of the book and stands out against official discourse. "Memorial de Tlatelolco" exhorts the

reader to inhabit the remembrance of the past, and to embrace collectively the search for justice, stating that factual evidence may not be sufficient for this purpose:

No busques en los archivos pues nada  
consta en actas.  
Mas he aquí que toco una llaga: es  
mi memoria.  
Duele, luego es verdad. Sangre con  
sangre y si la llamo mía traiciono a  
todos. (Castellanos in Poniatowska,  
163)

The contrast between such a poetic frame and official discourse on state terror evinces the hermeneutic tension faced by the reader. The poem is followed by a selection of newspaper headlines, which minimize the impact of state violence, functioning as an ironic veil that the reader needs to penetrate to glimpse a hidden truth. The poem, with its line “no consta en actas,” and the headlines from official discourse form a coupling that requires clarification. Proof then is never self-evident but always a process that the reader must accomplish. In fact, the very last sentence in the testimonial asks the reader to occupy a position of doubt about material corporeal reality—perhaps the most material kind of reality, a dead body—with the same distrust the students performed during their frenzied months of activism, to reveal the truth just like them, reaching the deep knowledge hidden behind official appearance.<sup>15</sup>

The suggestive statement repeated three times in the second segment of the book is pronounced by a soldier who addresses journalist, José Antonio del Campo, and it states: “Son cuerpos, señor ...” (Poniatowska, 172, 198, 274) As readers, we are forced to reconstruct the scene as a response to the journalist’s contemplation of dead bodies, to a daring and direct question posed to the soldier. But the concise nature of the statement also carries the sense of a self-evident instance, of an undeniable reality that should be taken at face value and that does not require any elucidation, as if dead bodies were business as usual for the speaking subject. Poniatowska’s incisive reiteration of the phrase and its use as the testimonial’s conclusion cannot be explained entirely as pure dramatization, although the haunting effect of violence as meaningless lingers in the mind of the reader. A second secret hides behind that ghostly, unseen and yet sensed, collection of dead bodies.

Poniatowska’s hybrid text carries a metonymic function, not embedded exclusively in the correlation between an individual life and the community it represents, but a symbolic residual function that extends to an exercise of radical politics in relation to the authoritarianism of the sovereign state. The metonymic function in *La noche de Tlatelolco* promotes a discursive reading as a democratic practice that seeks to exceed state calculation.

In *The Mexican Exception*, Gareth Williams proposes the state of exception as no exception in contemporary Mexican history: “[...] modernity in Mexico has been predicated on the permanent application of state power in the construction of social order, rather than on the self-limitation of state power via a legal system guaranteeing individual rights and limiting public power.” (Williams, 11) The state of exception, the state’s own suspension of the law to use violence as a means of “self-defense,” has structured Mexican politics since the creation of the liberal state, retooled during the institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution under the one-party system of the PRI that, as evinced by the assassination of Jaramillo and the incarceration of Demetrio Vallejo, resorted to an equally institutional violence whenever dissidence threatened its power. As Hodges and Gandy have described in their study on Mexican despotism, the student movement was part of a long line of protest and insurrection movements that expressed discontent toward the PRI regime after the close of the Cardenista government (1934-1940). Political protest and the PRI’s violent response to it had been on the official agenda well before 1968, but what differentiated the students’ activism was their rejection of a negotiation not carried publicly and democratically. This is why Hodges and Gandy state that “the students ripped away the revolutionary mask of the PRI government.” (Hodges and Gandy, 105) Indeed, students during that crucial year of 1968 performed “a complete disregard for the exceptionality of Mexico’s modern political order.” (Williams, 128)

The reiteration of narrative lines and iconographic referents related to dead bodies upon the pages of *La noche de Tlatelolco* refers the reader to the denunciation of what Christopher Harris has termed a “massacre of the innocent” (Harris, 487), which compels the reader to search for justice against the authoritarian state. The text, however, goes beyond the desire for justice, and impels a reading practice that fosters a contextual understanding of the events and the possibility of retaking the democratic

impulse behind the movement. The phrase “Son cuerpos, señor...” should, therefore, not be read as a timeless Mexican mythical reference, nor should it be considered solely as a particular instance of the massacre. This phrase encapsulates an inciting reference to the present necessity of a politics of memory that defies and fractures the modern sovereign rule of the state against its own citizens. The metonymic function of the narrative corporeal thread in *La noche de Tlatelolco*—illustrated through the circumlocution of “Son cuerpos, señor...”—situates the readers within a communal space beyond its mere reenactment, as witnesses to the state’s violent power, and as continuation of the student movement’s expressive claim to forms of critique of such totalitarian will, questioning violence and the official discourse which buried it.

*La noche de Tlatelolco* by Elena Poniatowska consolidates a text that reveals the complex dynamics at work in the literary representation of history. The simultaneous use of testimonio and chronicle creates a hybrid literary object that enables the reader to shift perspectives and interpret events from diverse positions, reproducing democratic practices that counterattack the authoritarian workings of sovereign power. *La noche de Tlatelolco* will undoubtedly continue to be the object of commentary and academic criticism. This study proposes the text be interpreted against the nationalist historiography of post-revolutionary Mexico. Following this approach, it will be significant to remind ourselves that the events to which it refers, the student movement of 1968 and the October 2 massacre, should unsettle our reading practices so that they do not become mere objects of commemoration, nor recast as past horror remembrance. The reenactment of the students’ democratic practices in *La noche de Tlatelolco* by means of a readership engaged in both an interpretive and an ethical pursuit, is one way of maintaining a creative tension between impunity, that of the state or any other agent, and justice. The questions surrounding the reading and teaching of *La noche de Tlatelolco* will continue to address important matters about the reconstruction of history as well as the relevance of the student movement’s democratic impulse and its validity in confronting present and future forms of violence.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The term “register” refers to two different meanings at play in *La noche de Tlatelolco*: On the one hand, the simple sense of keeping records by means of entries

that can be attached to the testimonials and documents making up the text. On the other, a subtle meaning that has to do with the effect of style on communication. In literary terms, it denotes an author’s style and the rapport it establishes with the reader. The term also applies to any communicative exchange in which context informs the message. *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* defines it thus: “In linguistics [...], any particular variety of a language [...] defined according to the situation of use. It concerns issues of appropriateness in relation to stylistic and formal features and degrees of formality. [...] The choice of an appropriate register is based on subject matter or domain, linguistic function, medium, social context, and relationships between the participants [...]. In relation to the mass media, examples would include *journalese* and the language of advertising [sic].” Taken from Chandler, Daniel, and Rod Munday. “Register.” *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*. Oxford UP, 2011. Oxford Reference. 2011. Date Accessed 21 Sep. 2013 <<http://0www.oxfordreference.com.catalog.sewanee.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-2290>>.

- 2 Salient works include Revueltas, José. *Juventud y revolución*. México D.F.: Ediciones Era, 2003, and De Alba, Luis González. *Los días y los años*. México D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1971, both interested in building a theoretical perspective on the events of ’68 and discussing the political imprisonment that followed the massacre. Taibo II, Paco Ignacio. ’68. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004, which deals with the student movement from a cultural and generational perspective. Alvarez, Garín R. *La estela de Tlatelolco: una reconstrucción histórica del movimiento estudiantil del ’68*. México, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, 1998, and Scherer, García, J, Carlos Monsiváis, and Marcelino García Barragán. *Parte de guerra, Tlatelolco 1968: Documentos del General Marcelino García Barragán: los hechos y la historia*. México, D.F.: Nuevo Siglo/Aguilar, 1999, both texts that produce new historical accounts about the movement in order to fend off its absorption into official discourse. Garín’s work extends the student movement’s chronology beyond the October 2 massacre by making it part of a longer history of struggle, linking ’68 to protest and guerrilla movements of the 1970s. Monsiváis and Scherer García’s book reproduces private documents by General García Barragán, who served



- as Secretary of National Defense from 1964-1970. The essays by the authors, together with facsimiles of the General's documents, prove that the massacre of October 2 was indeed a premeditated attack ordered by the government.
- 3 Gareth Williams has analyzed the historical misunderstanding proposed in *Postdata* as a way of turning a blind eye on state repression through the projection of a mythical past, excluding a veritable critique of the massacre. (Williams, 135-138)
  - 4 Student demands included the derogation of article 145 of the Mexican Penal Code, which granted extraordinary powers to the government, the liberation of political prisoners, and reforms to the police force. (Poniatowska, 60) For an in-depth history of the movement, see Ramírez, Ramón. *El movimiento estudiantil de México: julio/diciembre de 1968*. México D.F.: Ediciones ERA, 1969.
  - 5 The troops also murdered his pregnant wife and three sons; all were picked up after a raid on his home.
  - 6 For more on the Railroad Workers Union, see Alonso, Antonio. *El movimiento ferrocarrilero en México 1958-1959*. México D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1982.
  - 7 Rodda expressed regret about not pursuing the story further: "Apart from the initial shock and horror of the Square of the Three Cultures on 2 October 1968 was my bemusement that with a vast contingent of the world's media, not all of it sporting, the story disappeared so easily. [...] In part, I regret lacking the skill of a Norman Mailer or Alistair Cook who surely would have made the world sit up and take more notice." (Rodda, 20)
  - 8 Mexico gave subsidies to Central American delegations and supported South Africa's exclusion from the games for its Apartheid policy. (Claire and Keith Brewster, 106) The 1968 Olympics were the first to be hosted by a so-called Third World country.
  - 9 Zolov pays particular attention to the Olympics logo. The American artists who carried the project combined Op Art, a technique that creates images that play with optical perception, and craft designs borrowed from the Huichol, an indigenous group from central Mexico. Thus, authentic national identity was bestowed upon the games by combining modern aesthetics with the deep Mexico of indigenous culture.
  - 10 Remarks from interview by Elsa Arana Freire, originally published on October 1, 1971, in the magazine *7 días* (7 Days).
  - 11 Here is Beverley's definition of *testimonio*: "[...] a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience." (Beverley, 24) And for polyphonic *testimonio*: "Each individual *testimonio* evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences. Thus, one common formal variation on the classic first-person singular *testimonio* is the polyphonic *testimonio* made up of accounts by different participants in the same event." (Beverley, 28)
  - 12 The important distinction between written and oral narration, central to many *testimonios*, which poses a narrator who cannot access or produce written culture, and who is forced to transform an oral account into a literary object, could not be counted as a point of departure for *La noche de Tlatelolco*.
  - 13 Images range from student mobilizations to scenes of repression during and after the massacre. One salient example is the photograph of a wounded child who appears to be dead (image #43 in the photo-essay) and the caption underneath it: "¿Quién ordenó esto? ¿Quién pudo ordenar esto? Esto es un crimen." Although the picture and the caption seem to produce an immediate judgment, the emphasis is placed on the need to clarify responsibility about the events. The text's main objective is to discount the absolute quality of any kind of proof, no matter how verifiable it may seem, in order to afford the reader an autonomous enquiry about the events.
  - 14 For debates about the meaning of silence in *I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian woman in Guatemala*, see Moreiras, Alberto. "The aura of *Testimonio*"; and Sommer, Doris. "No Secrets." Published in *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*. Ed. Georg Gugelberger. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
  - 15 Christopher Harris has categorized *La noche de Tlatelolco* as a documentary fiction in which Poniatowska simultaneously creates an unbiased representation of the events while also persuading the reader to side with the victims. I agree with Harris' important exploration of Poniatowska's persuasive design, however, I feel that there is more at stake than only the proof of state culpability.

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